PRECARIOUS ATTACHMENTS

Anna E. Ward

Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2011, 352pp; £16.99 paperback

In a much anticipated follow-up to her sentimentality trilogy, Lauren Berlant's newest book, *Cruel Optimism*, focuses on our desire for things that are not good for us. She defines cruel optimism as 'when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing'; it's not just that something you desire is unattainable, but also that the wanting of that something actually impedes you getting what you seek. 'Why', Berlant asks, 'do people stay attached to conventional good-life fantasies - say, of enduring reciprocity in couples, families, political systems, institutions, markets, and at work - when the evidence of their instability, fragility, and dear costs abounds?' (p2). The reason why we hold on to unrealizable visions of the good life is because 'the loss of what's not working is more unbearable than the having of it' (p27). These visions, as cruel as they are, are also 'profoundly confirming' (p2).

Through meticulous readings of contemporary literature, film, and art, Berlant seeks to 'track the becoming general of singular things' (p12). Berlant trains her critical eye on both the historical present and the ordinary. 'The present is perceived, first, affectively' and the affective register most pertinent to Berlant is that of the impasse, 'a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic' (p4). One of Berlant's fundamental arguments threaded throughout the book is that we must think less in terms of grand notions of trauma, crisis, epidemic, and event, and more through 'the diffusion of trauma through the ordinary', 'crisis-ordinariness', the endemic, and the episode. 'Survival in the present of an ordinary collective life suffused with a historic and historical crisis to which we are always catching up', Berlant argues, '*is the way we live now*' (p59). Laced throughout the book are descriptions of ways of being that call up this sense of an enigmatic present to which we are always catching up - stuttering, drifting, holding on, treading water, floating, doggy paddling, improvising, coasting, tottering, wandering, maintaining, surviving, struggling, just to name a few.

Berlant's elaboration of the dynamic of cruel optimism in Chapter 1 and 2 focuses on these habits and repetitions around cruel objects that seem to 'guarantee the endurance of something, the survival of something, the flourishing of something' (p48) and what happens when those objects seem to recede. 'What constitutes continuity amid the pressure of structural inconstancy?', Berlant asks, and how is this informed by the privileges, racial, sexual, and otherwise, with which one encounters shifting parameters of living and living on? (p69) In Gregg Bordowitz's film *Habit* (2001), the rituals and habits of living with AIDS, Berlant argues, are a means of 'staying tethered to life' (p57), a way of 'preserving banality, turning care of the self into a mode of ordinariness' (p62). 'Embodied, affective rhythms of survival' (p11) also take the form of what Berlant calls intuition, particularly as evidenced in Colson Whitehead's novel *The Intuitionist* and William Gibson's novel *Pattern Recognition*.

In her Chapter 4 discussion of Mary Gaitskill's novel *Two Girls, Fat and Thin*, Berlant invokes the image of 'a small animal that, when picked up, never stops moving its legs' (p127); it is this image that best conveys her desire to articulate what she terms 'lateral agency', or agency that is 'consciously and unconsciously not toward imagining the long haul' (p117), not 'transformative or transcendent' (p137). Lateral agency isn't grand or heroic, nor does it really accomplish much of anything. This comes through well in Berlant's discussion of Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne's films *La Promesse* (1996) and *Rosetta* (1999) in Chapter 5 and her description of situation tragedy as 'a generic hybrid … where people are fated to express their flaws episodically, over and over, without learning, changing, being relieved, becoming better, or dying' (p176).

Berlant's initial introduction of lateral agency in Chapter 3, however, is less successful in its application than in later deployments. Notably, this is the only chapter in which her argument is not oriented around a cluster of literature, film, or art, and though she raises the question, 'So what is our object, our scene, our case?' (p103), the answer is not altogether clear. Berlant wades into the controversies of the so-called obesity epidemic, using fat as a case to examine the relationship between the temporalities of capitalism and notions of agency and sovereignty. For Berlant, fat is good to think with; unfortunately, she pays little mind to scholars who have thought about fat a great deal and have called into question the basic assumption this chapter hinges upon, namely, the connection she presumes between alimentary consumption, or 'appetitive excess', fat, and marginalized communities. Nonetheless, her concepts of 'slow death', or 'a condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life' (p100), and lateral agency are thought-provoking, even if the connection she makes between 'eating as a kind of self-medication through self-interruption' (p115) and obesity remains tenuous.

Related to lateral agency is Berlant's discussion of 'lateral or sideways mobility', (p222) as opposed to upward mobility, in Chapter 6. Through a beautifully executed examination of Laurent Cantet's films *Ressources humaines* (1999) and *L'Emploi du temps* (2001), Berlant navigates questions of what happens when precarity expands to or engulfs those groups formerly promised the good life and 'how different kinds of people catch up to their new situation' (p192). Her answer is the impasse, or an 'animated suspension' in which 'people try to maintain themselves in it until they figure out how to adjust' (p195).

In the final chapter, Berlant turns her attention to the political and to the question, 'When is the desire for the political an instance of cruel optimism?' (p19). Here, Berlant offers a useful frame that distinguishes 'between *politics* as a scene of antagonism and *the political* as that which magnetizes a desire for intimacy, sociality, affective solidarity, and happiness' (p252). How do we recognize our cruel attachments to politics, to objects and scenarios that never get close enough to reach or come to pass, without giving up our fantasies for something else right now? How do we refuse 'the ordinariness of suffering, the violence of normativity, and the "technologies of patience" that enable a concept of the *later* to suspend questions about the cruelty of the *now*'? (p28). While Berlant does not provide a map for how to navigate away from our cruel attachments, she does suggest that taking these affective attachments seriously is a necessary starting point, as is the recognition that it is 'awkward and threatening to detach from what is already not working' (p263).

Cruel Optimism is a must read for any scholar interested in exploring the affective dimensions of precarity. The text is a wonderful interlocutor for the works of Judith Butler, Sara Ahmed,

Ann Cvetkovich, Elspeth Probyn, Kathleen Stewart, and José Muñoz. Like most of Berlant's writing, the book is dense; however, her writing seems more effortless than in previous books, though certainly no less complex. There's more lyricism, more clarity, and in a book that could be downright grim, there's even some of Berlant's trademark playfulness. *Cruel Optimism* does precisely what Berlant's work always does - it changes the conversation in such a way that it makes you wonder why we weren't talking about these things all along.

'To Be To Be Tool'

Laurent Milesi

Arthur Bradley, *Originary Technicity: The Theory of Technology from Marx to Derrida*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 216pp; £50 hardback

Deceptively reduced to a trajectory 'from Marx to Derrida' in its subtitle, Arthur Bradley's timely study offers a self-styled 'critical genealogy of Derrida's theory of originary technicity' (p3), which he minimally defines as 'the empirico-transcendental condition *of* life itself' (p14). This first comprehensive reconstruction of a Derrida-inspired notion first given conceptual centre stage in Beardsworth's 1996 study on *Derrida and the Political* takes us not only through Marx, Freud and Lacan, Heidegger, and Derrida, but also, in the last two chapters, Stiegler (Derrida's former pupil) and several trans-, post-, anti-humanist critics and embodiment theorists (Haraway, Hayles, De Landa, Hansen, Meillassoux). The book is divided into seven chapters, which draw a neat arc from 'Life' to 'Death', taking in such 'essential' aspects as labour, the psyche, Being, the Other, and time, each of which is aligned with one major thinker and/or area of thinking (philosophy, psychoanalysis).

From the first, introductory section, on the 'being-technical of life itself from its pre-human inception millions of years ago, to the final, more tentative scenarios looking beyond human finitude towards species extinction (Meillassoux) and cosmological death (Lyotard), Bradley consistently unfolds 'the aporia of originary technicity itself', by tracking 'a residual anthropocentrism' (p19) or humanism even in those theories most driven by a desire to think technology-in-itself.

Two-thousand years of philosophical repression of technics start with the ancient Greek opposition between *phusis* and *tekhnè*, between a self-causing ('auto-matic') *causa efficiens* and an inert, instrumental *prosthesis*, to which may be added the more specifically Platonic distinction between *anamnesis* (living memory: primary, pure, self-present, technics-free) and *hypomnesis* (non-living technological supplement: derived, prosthetic, artefactual) which will provide a recurrent touchstone throughout.

The gradual, yet irreversible growth of the machine metaphor, from Descartes through the eighteenth century, leads Bradley to his first major port of call: the dialectic relation between man and the instruments he employs to perform labour in Marx, Derrida's '*premier penseur de la technique*' whose historical materialism is the first to propose a radical critique of the Aristotelian understanding of *technè* and to ontologise technology in his theory of labour (p27). However, in a second movement of the analysis, Marx's critique of capital is shown to risk '*re-ontologising* the human over and against the technical' (p28). Marx's new technological materialism never totally supplants an atavistic humanism glimpsed in his earlier writings, before the introduction of a mutual constitution of the human and the technical through the labour process in Marx's writings after the Paris manuscripts: man's enfranchisement from the instruments of production whose deployment by capital has resulted in his alienation or 'exteriorisation', is bought at the cost of the subsumption and internalisation of the

machine, when a future communist humanity 'finally assumes the collective subject position of technological mastery' (p37), and what once was an ontological condition for technology 'is reduced to little more than a dialectical moment in the narrative of humanity's emancipation *from* technics' (p38). But at least technics in Marx's overall itinerary has shifted from a prosthetic (Aristotelian) to an intra-thetic position (p40).

With the fast-paced advent of new technologies and sciences (such as thermodynamics) comes an intensification of the analogy between the organic and the mechanical, begun by Descartes' body-as-clock in the *Meditations*, whose logical outcome can be found in Freud's comparison between the psyche (with its *drives*) and the machine, and specifically his conception of the psyche as a writing machine from his unfinished *Project for a Scientific Psychology* onwards. Taking his bearings from a resolutely Derridean problematic, Bradley draws a parallel between Freud's 'differential model of the psyche' and the Saussurean linguistic model and differential nature of the sign (p45). Derrida's findings in his famous essay on the Mystic Writing Pad, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', allow him to re-visit the Greek distinction between *anamnesis* and *hypomnesis* via the deconstruction of memory as a stratified, originary prosthesis. Yet, Bradley contends in one of his first engagements, preparatory to the following chapter on Heidegger, with the aporetic relationship between an ontological a priori of technicity and the 'ontic state of matter', even Derrida - notwithstanding (or because of?) his own critique of the metaphorical limitations of Freud's machinic model - risks effacing the latter in order to make the former, larger claim of an 'immemorial logic of generalised writing' (p50) or irreducible '*arche*-writing'. In the second part of the chapter, despite the self-proclaimed return to the materialism of early Freudian psychoanalysis in his 1954-55 seminars on *Freud and Technique*, Lacan is shown to stop similarly short of fully de-idealising the machine metaphor for the mind, regardless of his attempt to deploy a more automatic, subjectless, exteriorised *technè* of consciousness (pp60, 64): 'technological exteriority remains nothing more than the anthropomorphised projection of psychic interiority' (p65).

The author of 'The Question Concerning Technology' (the context of whose intervention, after a lecture by quantum physicist Werner Heisenberg, Bradley judiciously recalls and analyses, pp88-89) has often been regarded as the first influential philosopher capable of thinking technics ontologically, as the originary Being of technics independently of even the being-technical of man at the origin. In such an ex-propriation of technics from humanity, beyond even the exteriorisation of man, subject, and consciousness in mnemo-technical repositories seen so far, Heidegger's notion of 'ek-sistence' would seem to harbour the possibility of at last thinking technics *per se*, externally of any recuperative consciousness, alongside a more originary disclosure of Being. Furthermore, this return to pre-Socratic thought which allowed the German thinker to uncover the (auto)*poietic* nature of technicity, thus undoing the classical division between *phusis* (subsequently reduced to 'nature') and artefactuality, would further militate in favour of a successful 'disenclosure' of technics. Yet Heidegger's ontology of *technè* has ironically been charged with reducing, even repressing or excluding, the constitutive force of empirical ontic technics while valorising a quasi-naturalist mode of *phusis* as poietic presencing incompatible with more modern forms of production and emerging (especially 'virtual') technologies (pp69, 75). All modes of technology thus become the vehicles of the a-letheic disclosure of a primordial, non-technological *phusis* and, in more excessive terms, the violent, idealist reduction of technology's material exteriority or the embodied technological

real which Mark Hansen designates as *technesis* (p77). In Bradley's neat formula, Heidegger's philosophy is 'less [about] the technologisation of *phusis* than the ontological "naturalisation" of technology' (p75), and the question becomes once again that of antecedence versus retroactive constitution, of the kind which, although Bradley does not mention it (as opposed to the ontico-ontological difference, pp81, 85), Derrida asks of Heidegger in '*Geschlecht* I' in relation to primacy about the division between ontological and sexual difference:[1] can such a structural ontologisation of technics proceed without recognising a prior given ontics of matter that legitimates its foundations and revealability (p81; p177, n. 21)?

Since Bradley's overall argument is informed by a broadly deconstructive problematic, the chapter on Derrida is of strategic import. Prefaced by the famous passage in *Memoires: For Paul de Man* where Derrida places the questioning of the dissociation between thought and technology at the core of deconstruction (p94), it investigates how Derrida's debunking of a pure, natural, non-technical origin and claim of a generalised technicity within thought is still haunted by a residual, re-transcendentalising idealism, a 'materialism without matter' (p99). However, the critique in Derrida's case can no longer be content with positing a simple externality,[2] and this is where the residual thinking subject still in excess of (a now internalised) technicity comes to the fore in Bradley's incessant pursuit of anthropological resistance. Similarly, not unlike Heidegger, Derrida is found guilty of subordinating empirical ontic technics to an aprioric ontological ground (p104). This is where - a rare slippage in Bradley's otherwise convincing readings and near-impeccable logic - a slightly hasty conflation of deconstruction with 'a *thinking* that "repeats" the possibility of religion without religion' (from *The Gift of Death*, where Derrida is in fact discussing several predecessors and contemporary philosophers) is taken as a point of departure to grapple with the hypothesis whether Derrida's turn to religion (itself a moot point beyond the scope of such a short review[3]) might not be a turn away from technics (p114).

If for Derrida the aporia of time, or *différance* as spatio-temporalisation, is the quasi-transcendental condition of all technicisation, even in the so-called phenomena of 'live' or 'Real Time' made possible by recent tele-technologies (p101), conversely for Stiegler it is empirical technical inscription that makes possible all temporalisation, even that aporia of temporalisation which Derrida calls originary technicity (p103) - a re-emphasis on the empirical which has led to the opposite charge of technological determinism. Combining deconstruction with Leroi-Gourhan's anthropological findings in (especially) *Gesture and Speech*, Stiegler famously stressed the role of epiphylogenetic transmission in human development, beyond the lifespan of an individual, a break with 'pure life' insofar as it is an exteriorisation by way of artefactual memory aids (*hypomnemata*): the human ability to temporalise 'is constituted through, rather than merely supplanted by, mnemo-technical prostheses' (p120), and what is called the human is this process of exteriorisation that has no pre-existing (as opposed to retroactively constituted) interiority (p123). However, like others before him, Bradley rightly queries why Stiegler, even against scientific evidence, reserves epiphylogenetic heritage for the human alone (p130), a 'state of exception' (Agamben) for a species otherwise originarily constituted through a necessary lack (*le défaut qu'il faut d'origine*) that not only folds Stiegler's view of 'life' back to (an albeit technologised form of) classical anthropology but likewise threatens to restrict his subsequent critical (bio-)politics - for example of the technical constitution of temporalisation in the epoch of hyperindustrialisation (pp131 ff.).

The 'final' attempt to look beyond residual anthropologism ranges across philosophies of the (trans-, post-, in-)human, offering different critical scenarios (including postbiological fantasies) of the 'end of man' and of the 'human-to-come' as an impossible witness to his own demise, which recalls the issue of the post-apocalyptic sublime outlined in the mid-1980s.[4]

The above summary barely does justice to the main axes of Bradley's patiently rigorous, yet - despite its ambitious difficulty - highly accessible, even 'pedagogical' journey, with its numerous reprises and signposting as well as thematic criss-crossings (for example on time, pp34-35, 126, etc.) or its useful prospective and retrospective linkages between the various thinkers and their respective precursors. Yet, without wanting in any way to detract from such a splendid work, I would like to venture two main objections.

While Bradley concedes early on that 'contemporary philosophy of technics is scarcely a philosophy of "technology"' (p14), the phrase is repeatedly used in conjunction with most of his major thinkers (e.g. Lacan, p65; Heidegger, p68), Derrida (p98)), and one is left to tease out for each of these how 'technics'/ 'technicity' is to be distinguished from 'technology', including 'in the received sense of that term' (p98). Indeed, one also wonders why he has not provided a rationale for demarcating and excluding from his own genealogical (re)construction the vast, arguably better documented, historical array of 'philosophies of technology' - from Ernst Kapp's 1877 *Grundlinien einer Philosophie der Tecknik* [*sic*], then José Ortega y Gasset's pre-Heideggerian reflections, Lewis Mumford (*Technics and Civilization*, 1934; the various works dealing with 'the myth of the machine'), and, after Jacques Ellul's influential *La Technique: L'enjeu du siècle* (1964), to several recent, often postphenomenological variants (Don Ihde, Andrew Feenberg), sometimes proposing a return to the Kantian thing-in-itself in the name of technology,[5] some of whose texts join forces with animal posthumanism.[6] More specifically when dealing with Heidegger, one would have welcomed some consideration of Günther Anders's contemporaneous pioneering insights into the gap between enhanced technological capacity and humanity's ability to imagine it, if only because this version of the (Kantian) sublime (see p156, with Lyotard's critique) cuts to the core of the divide between technology and thought.[7]

My second and last consideration is directed at the critical finality of Bradley's project. Arguably (and he is not unaware of it), there is ultimately an ironic aporia at the heart of this otherwise commendable, rigorously executed venture, whose force and aim - to gesture towards a de-anthropocentrised thinking of technicity-in-itself - also has to be its weakness. To rephrase and address back to him one of the forms which his own critical questioning takes (pp18, 19): to what degree is it possible to escape the reduction of technics to a question to be posed by an implied thinking subject or a pre-technical *ego cogito* (p87: 'a question *for* a thinking *Dasein*), even if only recursively (p67)?

How can the irreducibly inhuman be thought outside a human, let alone given what 'thinking' (still) means and implies? More: 'is' there such a thing or essence as the self-determination of technics? While the notion of an 'originary technicity' (or Stiegler's 'originary prostheticity' of the human) bravely attempts to resist the utilitarian instrumentalisation of technicity by thought, it cannot avoid being 'interiorised' back in the latter through the very process of critical thinking which tries to liberate it - a larger aporetic outcome of the kind of failed dialectic to empower technics *per se* glimpsed in the Marx chapter. Ultimately, Bradley seems to suggest that a truly technical thinking is still to come (pp163-4), and the book closes tentatively on what a full de-anthropocentrisation of technicity could look like: (sublimated)

technics without 'technology'... But is what would be after all a new form of foundationalism possible, let alone desirable, that is, to what 'ends', beyond what would remain a purely intellectual, critical or philosophical exercise? Perhaps, until such a utopian time comes along - but will that be one of and for a species still called 'humanity'? - technicity is and will remain indissociable from what Agamben calls the 'anthropological machine' (p66).

Notes

1. See Jacques Derrida, '*Geschlecht* I: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference', *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume II*, edited by Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2008, pp7-26.

2. See for example 'The Outside Is the Inside', *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (corrected ed, trans), Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, pp44-65.

3. A proper, renewed engagement with this controversial viewpoint would have to start from period 30 in 'Circumfession', where Derrida states: 'my religion about which nobody understands anything [...]'. See Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, Geoffrey Bennington (trans), Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1993, p154.

4. See the special *Diacritics* issue on 'nuclear criticism', 14, 2, (summer 1984).

5. See for example the short section on Friedrich Dessauer in Carl Mitcham's, *Thinking through Technology: The Path between Engineering and Philosophy*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp29-33.

6. See for example Jussi Parikka's somewhat eccentric, *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

7. See Christopher Müller's forthcoming monograph on *Shame and Technicity* in that respect.

ORDINARY AND EVERYWHERE

Annebella Pollen

Martin Hand, *Ubiquitous Photography*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012, 219pp; £14.99 paperback

Martin Hand's timely overview of the discourses, technologies and practices of digital photography draws on a range of approaches from the sociology of consumption, visual and media culture alongside science and technology studies to offer a useful introduction to the complexities of contemporary photographic debates, particularly in relation to popular practice. Hand argues that 'the confines of photography studies, with their primary focus on the visual image, are necessarily limited in their scope for understanding the broad dynamics of digitisation'. He suggests instead that such a study 'requires analyses that pay serious attention to the theory and history of photography but equally are able to move well beyond those boundaries' (p4). While this assertion seems to indicate an insularity in photography studies that some would say misrepresents the broad and catholic nature of the field, in practice Hand's primary interest in how photographs are used, rather than their 'discursive, semiotic and material character' (p59), means that he doesn't actually examine images at all. There is certainly a persuasive case to be made that the camera 'has always been a relational device', even 'a node' embedded in larger social, cultural, technological and ideological networks (p132), and indeed that 'photographies are best understood as practices', (p97) yet what gets pictured is clearly an integral part of the process of meaning-making. Subject matter is not arbitrary. Ubiquitous *photography* - rather than the gargantuan abundance of *photographs*, in all their complex specificity - is the principal concern here.

Despite this deliberate - but perhaps convenient - omission, there is no doubt that *Ubiquitous Photography* will function very well as a stimulating teaching tool and as an up-to-date primer for those new to the area. The book largely serves to synthesise, debate and challenge existing knowledge about the proliferation and pervasiveness of popular photographic practice, which it does very effectively and comprehensively. To a lesser extent, it also contributes new knowledge on the subject, in the form of empirical case studies that aim to examine 'the different and complex relationships between digital images and the material environments within which they are actually enacted and distributed' (p95). Research conducted for this book included content analysis of the entire back catalogue of *Popular Photography* magazine (1937-present) to investigate 'the emergence of digital photography as a recognizable practice' (p20), a social biography of the digital camera itself, and ethnographic interviews with a range of digital photographic consumers, from archivists to camera club members and undergraduate students. This material, disappointingly, is not always foregrounded in the book - indeed some results are hardly visible - and what is used sometimes serves merely to add colourful quotations, by way of illustration, to points already established through theoretical discussion. When this empirical material is highlighted, however, Hand makes striking observations that can enhance understanding of the effects of multiplication and diversification on contemporary

photographic practices in everyday life.

For example, Hand's archival research reveals a pertinent parallel between technological shifts from analogue to digital photography in the late twentieth century and wet-plate to dry-plate processes in the late nineteenth century. In an amusing extract from a 1900 edition of *Photographic News* that suggests a technological determinism all too familiar in the many inflated claims made for digital photography, it is asserted, 'in photography, as in everything else, the fittest survives, and the fittest negative process is gelatino-bromide on glass, paper and film' (p100). Anxieties around change are also mapped through more recent histories of popular photographic and computing literature. Here digital technology has shifted from being conceptualised as an indication of a medium in crisis (in relation to the autonomy of the photographer, for example) to a site of creative promise. Hand shows, through this archival material, how digital cameras, as a 'predatory technology', needed to be carefully ascribed with aspects of familiarity alongside their technical novelty in order to achieve popularity. He also links longer historical concerns about automation in photography - as a longstanding threat to art, for example - with more recent anxieties about digital automation as deskilling. Through examination of the different ways that digital photography has been described by the press (for example, as potentially undermining the precarious boundary between the 'serious' photographer and the casual snapper) *and* through the practices of its users (which demonstrate that digital cameras can afford experimentation, greater control and rapid build-up of tacit knowledge), Hand is able to balance a range of sources to overturn received wisdom.

Throughout, Hand aims to trace digital photography's complexity through its relationship to earlier photographies. This is a refreshing approach that tempers the occasionally apocalyptic and ahistorical claims made of photography's imminent demise at the advent of digital formats. While there are some radical departures and even cultural ruptures evident in the present photographic landscape, Hand seeks to locate precisely which practices are historically seamless and which dismantle and reassemble traditions. In most cases, Hand argues that there has largely been an 'intensification' of pre-existing photographic practices as a result of its mass-proliferation and mass-distribution, but he also identifies important, unprecedented consequences of photography's new expansion into ubiquity. One of these concerns the routine 'overabundance' of individuals' personal photograph collections and the seemingly inexhaustible range of methods available for their storage and classification. In Chapter 5, in particular, Hand examines the effects that these new methods may have on memory making, and highlights the simultaneous fear of loss (of our precious, vulnerable photographs) with the fear of endurance (of resilient photos, archived forever online, that we would rather forget). Through his interviews with undergraduate students, Hand draws out some of the novel ethical challenges and 'affective responsibilities' bound up with photo-sharing practices that indicate a need for new models of living publicly in what he chillingly describes as a 'post-privacy world' (p183). Hand's student interviewees offer interesting insights into the changing effects of ubiquity on photography's perceived authenticity and value. Ephemerality is increasingly prized over durability, as demonstrated in the production and display of what might be called 'bad photographs'; 'the banal or in-between moments not normally included in edited or ordered narratives' (p92). Through these kinds of images, Hand argues, authenticity is manufactured and performed though the picturing of mundanity.

It is these tantalising micro-empirical studies of photography practice on the ground that

are the most satisfying and original aspects of Hand's text; they are also, unfortunately, among the briefest. It is a shame that this new research was not given a more leading role. As digital photography is evidently so ubiquitous, broad theoretical claims made about its character and meaning inevitably risk generalisation. The specific material affordances of digitisation, as Hand wisely points out, 'are enacted differently in relation to established conventions ... among different constituencies' (p94). Where Hand is able to examine these specific, localised cultural practices, he demonstrates digital photography's particularities and complexities rather than narrowing understanding of the form. The mixed methods of Hand's approach allow him to argue, convincingly, for the mutual photographic entanglement of technology and practice. Image analysis remains frustratingly absent as the obvious missing element that would triangulate - and potentially further problematise - these fascinating debates.

MIND THE GAP

Colin Gardner

Simon O'Sullivan, *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams of the Finite-Infinite Relation*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 300pp; £60.00 hardback

Simon O'Sullivan's provocative new book approaches the problem of subjectivity on a number of interrelated levels. Firstly it is a work of philosophy, collapsing the binary oppositions of subject-object, self-other, finitude-infinitude and desire-ethics by turning to an immanent tradition of thought, grounded in Spinoza and continuing through Nietzsche and Bergson to the collaborative work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Running counter to the idealist and transcendentalist genealogy of thought that spans from Platonism to the Cartesian *Cogito*, whereby difference, desire and being are necessarily the result of an external causality, in Spinoza being is singular, univocal and self-affirming. Spinozan ontology is the self-conscious cause of itself - with no dependent need on an external other. Secondly, Spinozism is an ethics, a speculative, practical mode of *living*, a joyful auto-affection involving an enquiry into what a body (and therefore thought) can do in terms of its ability to affect and be affected in turn. Immanence then, is a life and nothing else: complete power, complete bliss. It partakes of essences and their intensive states, regulated by internal vectors of varying speeds and slowness rather than an ordering signifying function that reduces being to a discursive functionalism. For O'Sullivan, the key question becomes, 'Does what we do in our lives produce sadness or joy? Are we rendered impotent and paralysed, or active and generative? It is in this sense that the battleground of subjectivity, it seems to me, *is* affect' (p7).

Finally, following Guattari, this is an ethico-aesthetic positioning of the subject as a speculative artistic creation. In this sense, O'Sullivan combines Guattari's strategy of 'metamodelisation' with the painter's diagram, which Deleuze utilizes in his study of Francis Bacon to pass through chaos and catastrophe while at the same time avoiding the twin traps of orthodoxy and cliché. Thus 'Metamodelisation' is a processual, combinatory and synthetic logic which doesn't just signify and represent but communicates suggestively by spiralling out from pre-existing models to create a new synthesis, one characterized by different speeds to the discursive, thereby producing a new form of thought. Similarly, the diagrammatic (or abstract machine) does not function to represent a pre-existing real, but rather, as an operative set of asignifying and non-representative lines and zones, constructing a real that is yet to come.

As an artist and philosopher, O'Sullivan is ideally positioned to explore and exploit this multiple trajectory, and indeed his book is not only an insightful and often subtle exegesis of the 'literature of immanence' but also an active intervention into its creative potential, its ethical subjectivities 'to come'. Organized as a series of five stand-alone case studies, each chapter produces a fruitful convergence of dialogues and encounters. Thus we have the immanent commonalities between Spinoza, Bergson and Nietzsche (Chapter 1); the ethico-aesthetic discourses of Foucault ('The Care of the Self ' as a special kind of knowledge accessible only via technologies of transformation) and Lacan (Chapter 2); Guattari's evolution from a concern with

the finite-infinite relation to biopolitics (Chapter 3); a contrast between Deleuze and Badiou's notion of the event (virtual and active respectively) and its relation to the body; and finally the collaborative work of Deleuze and Guattari and the role of chaoids and probe heads against the 'black hole-white mask' over-coding function of faciality. Equally important is that each chapter is also accompanied by its own series of diagrams, which evolve and mutate to create new composites and relations of adjacency, the speculative germ of a new order or rhythm.

O'Sullivan's key first move is to position the subject as an intrinsic part of the object, as a manifestation of the finite woven into infinite. This necessarily entails a focus on 'subjectivity' - which is processual and fluid - rather than the 'subject-as-is' (as an homogenized entity). Subjectivity is by its very nature pragmatic and speculative: it must be carried out in the contemporary world (avoiding, as much as possible, *doxa*/opinion) and is largely future-oriented. Subjectivity is thus the subject's very connection to an outside, the finite-infinite relationship in-itself. More importantly, immanence is predicated on the fact that the object always precedes the subject, for 'any subject comes after, or is secondary to, a given process that is primary. It is this positioning of the object and *then* the subject that seems crucial to the thinkers collected here' (p6). This embedded quality of subjectivity as always already lived on the plane of immanence allows it to escape the logic of doubt and negation and provides the springboard for Deleuze's passive synthesis of life as joyful auto-affection.

However, this can only be effectively manifested through the guarantee of a continuum between the finite and infinite whereas a gap between them will always produce a melancholy subject. It is in this sense that an understanding of the 'gap' is crucial to O'Sullivan's argument as it recurs through each case study and its attendant diagram. Thus in Spinoza's *Ethics*, the gap is gradually bridged as we move through the three levels of knowledge, from imagination (the immediate experience of effects based on crude sense perception, association and hearsay); through reason (knowledge of the universal laws of nature and reason through the application of 'common notions'); and finally intuitive knowledge (the grasp of the finite body as it inheres in nature - the infinite - an understanding of its essence through an immanent chain of causes). It is only the third level that produces pure joy and necessitates a move from individuality to singularity, with its concern with pure intensities.

One of the creative highlights of O'Sullivan's approach is that he enables us to superimpose the Spinozan model onto other, perhaps more familiar diagrams, such as Bergson's famous 'Cone of Memory'. Taking the form of an inverted cone, the diagram illustrates the gap between the virtual (that which is pure memory) and the actual (pure perception, involved with the present). Thus the ellipse AB at the base of the cone constitutes the totality of memory (Deleuze's virtual) which co-exists with its apex, point S, the sensory-motor body in contact with the present as a plane of matter (Deleuze's actual). However, AB includes within itself all the intermediate sections - A'B', A"B", etc, that measure the degrees of a purely ideal relationship to S. They include the totality of the past but at a more or less expanded or contracted level depending upon motor or psychic need. As O'Sullivan argues, point S is the equivalent of Spinoza's first level of knowledge. We - as a body - are not a vessel containing memories but a probe or point moving through matter and which is also part of that matter. At this level, all mental life is determined by action, relegating the speculative function of the mind (divorced from experience and action) to the province of intuition.

However, it's important to note that the past hasn't ceased to be but has simply ceased to be

useful regarding the specific action of any given moment. The past is coextensive with the present, surviving in a pure unconscious state. The problem then becomes – and this recurs throughout the book - how to access this pure past (the infinite), the ontological ground of our individual being? After all, 'this past might be a resource of sorts in the production of a specifically different kind of subjectivity' (p38). In this case the infinite (Spinoza's joyful passions at point AB) may be accessed by creating a gap at point S - 'it is a question of a certain relaxing of the sensory-motor schema (that is, a hesitancy or the gap) that allows "access" to this large ontological field' (p160). In other words you make one gap (on the plane of matter) in order to make a bridge across another gap (between plane of matter and the field of pure memory) which allows us to break with habit and live a full, affective and joyful life: the life of the nomad/mystic/dreamer.

Ultimately, the Bergsonian cone serves multiple purposes and goes through many mutations throughout the book. Thus Nietzsche's eternal return is conceived not as a return to the past on the plane of matter but a spiralling circuit within the cone itself, bringing the infinite into the realm of the finite through a vital affirmation, a pure becoming. Lacan's inaccessible Real (the incommensurable catalyst for desire-as-lack) may also be superimposed on the interior of the cone as an unbridgeable gap with the plane of matter (the realm of the symbolic order). Significantly, the cone itself eventually becomes redundant and must be re-diagrammed in light of new asignifying (read: machinic) functions. Thus O'Sullivan initially contrasts it in relation to the form of the donut-shaped torus, whose exterior circumference represents Lacanian desire with the central hole designated as 'das Ding', so that Bergson's point S would be forever confined to the outer rim while point AB would be sucked into the void of the hole.

Ultimately the three-dimensional cone gives way to a flattened diagram of desiring-production, marking a shift away from Deleuze's early adherence to Bergsonian virtual-active binarism to the Guattarian concept of 'chaosmosis'. Following Spinoza, the latter is always an *a priori* moment of creativity or desire that prefigures any given entity or subject-object relation. It's unfixed and ontologically unstable, yet it always accompanies the forms that emerge from it. Guattari calls this groundless ground 'chaosmosis' itself, and the entities that emerge from it 'subjectivities.' In the newly revised diagram then, Bergson's old point S (the sensory-motor), is replaced by a generator of desiring production (the celibate machine), and the condensed and contracted circles of the cone are now flattened 'ripple effects' (disjunctive syntheses) spreading towards an outside on a body without organs. So where's the unconscious subject? Orphaned, a wandering nomad, deterritorialized to the outer orbit of the plane of immanence, defined only by the states through which it passes.

Significantly, O'Sullivan doesn't fall into the trap of concluding his analysis with Deleuze and Guattari as the latest form of immanent 'ur-text.' Rather, he introduces a new line of flight with a discussion of several proponents of 'Speculative Realism,' most notably Quentin Meillassoux, Reza Negarestani, Graham Harman, Ray Brassier and Ian Hamilton Grant. For some readers searching for a 'closure effect', this may have an unsatisfactory 'tacked on' feel. However, it's fully in line with the book's ongoing diagrammatic schema, encouraging the opening up of new zones and lines for the reader to produce their own configurations-to-come. After all, as Deleuze notes, 'The essential point about the diagram is that it is made in order for something to *emerge* from it, and if nothing emerges from it, it fails. And what emerges from the diagram, the Figure, emerges both gradually and all at once …' (*Francis Bacon*, p128). Which is an apt summation of the book as a whole.

DIGGING MACHINES

Niels Kerssens

Jussi Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?*, Cambridge and Malden, Polity Press, 2012, 205pp; £15.99 paperback

Media archaeology is one of the buzzwords of contemporary media historical research, yet at the same time it remains curiously ungraspable. With *What is Media Archaeology?* Jussi Parikka provides the urgently needed map into this new field's extensive domain. The book offers a highly readable account of media archaeologies' main approaches and associated theories from the last two decades, making it a rich introduction for those new to the field. But also for those already familiar the book is an excellent read. It offers an ambitious, although at points too ambitious, attempt to propel media archaeology forward as it explores its potential as 'a twenty-first-century humanities methodology' (p160) tuned to the interdisciplinary study of the archaeological substrates of digital media culture in particular.

With the clarity of a text-book, seven chapters review the diverse body of both explicitly media archaeological and affiliated research, from Thomas Elsaesser's New Film History as media archaeology and Jonathan Crary's archaeology of perception, to Eric Kluitenberg's and Siegfried Zielinski's studies into imaginary media, Wolfgang Ernst's reconsideration of the archive and media archaeology brought into practice as an artistic methodology by artists such as Paul DeMarinis and Zoe Beloff. Simultaneously, the chapters introduce and practice contemporary theory connected to media archaeology, with particular attention paid to the materialism of German media theory and its link to new fields in media studies such as software studies and platform studies.

Reviewing media archaeologies' varied theoretical and methodological past, Parikka offers a valuable vision for '*how to think media archaeologically* in contemporary culture' (p2), working toward a much needed methodological consensus. Essentially, this mode of thinking comes out as Foucauldian, as Parikka builds on Michel Foucault's most fundamental archaeological and genealogical values. Emphasizing the need to excavate 'conditions of existence' (p18) in particular, Parikka is more than right to argue that media archaeology can account for the political, economic, technological and scientific underpinnings of digital media culture, while such emphasis enables media archaeology to break with its traditional fetish for the obscure media object and their inventors.

The greatest strength of the book is that it opens up a novel computational perspective on the history of digital media culture that brings socio-technological conditions into view other than those provided by the popular human-centred historical accounts of silicon-valley entrepreneurialism. Integral to the media archaeology that Parikka advocates, then, is a strong argument for a medium-specific approach that looks into the past through the lens of new media's unique computational materiality and distinctive archival conditions. Inspired by Friedrich Kittler's media materialism and, amongst others, the work of Wolfgang Ernst on the new status of the archive in digital culture, Parikka insists that media archaeology 'goes *under*

the hood' (p83) of hardware and software and approaches the media machine as archive, to unravel, for example, how digital and networked technologies find the unperceivable ground for their existence in modern science. With his 'archaeology of noise' (p91) as a case study in chapter 5, Parikka presents a lucid example of what medium-specificity means in the practice of historicizing digital culture's past. Starting from the idea that noise - spam, viruses, etc. - is integral to today's networked media environment, Parikka explores the scientific domain concealed under its figurative hood, and shows how this technological environment finds a critical condition for its existence, a 'technical a priori' (p99), in the 1940s, with Claude Shannon's mathematical theory of communication and his formalization of noise as integral to any communication system.

Parikka's ambitious attempt to establish media archaeology as a modern humanities methodology operative at the forefront of digital culture research, however, does at certain points feel a bit overzealous, leaving the reader with too many possible answers to the book's main question and title, *What is Media Archaeology?* The book throws (too) many media archaeological balls in the air at the same time, simultaneously pursuing media archaeology as: new media culture's historical research strand; an art method that acts at the forefront of contemporary practice-based research; a domain that upholds a close relation to digital humanities; and a field that has its voice in contemporary debates on new materialism, cultural heritage and software studies.

To give shape to a theory and methodology that is specific to the study of digital culture, positioning media archaeology as what Parikka terms a 'travelling discipline' (p15) is one of the book's major strengths, enabling media archaeology to draw on and produce anew the rich conceptual and methodological grounds of cultural studies and the varying (new) strands of media studies. With too much emphasis on the nomadic and multifarious character of the approach, however, opened up is the possibility that media archaeology eventually fails to establish an actual territory of its own, that is, to be effectively operational as 'a theory and methodology of digital media culture' (p5). In the contemporary climate of heavy budget cuts in the humanities it is understandable that Parikka spreads the chances of media archaeologies' survival as a twenty-first century critical media methodology, however, lacking a clear centre of gravity in the project, the possibility remains that media archaeology becomes an empty signifier; a label attached to a software studies, platform studies or other novel new media studies project, when it goes historical.

Don't get me wrong, Parikka's book provides an excellent reorientation of the media archaeological project towards the specificities of digital media culture and can function as a fruitful and varied inspiration for those that intend to pursue an 'excavation of the everyday culture of digitality' (p18). However, it should, in my opinion, temper its ambitions and focus on what Parikka, in reference to Foucault, describes in the introduction to the book as its 'basic question' […], 'what are the conditions of existence of this thing, of that statement, of these discourses and the multiple media(ted) practices with which we live?' (ibid). At its core, media archaeology entails a particular archaeological mode of thinking and writing (maybe even practicing) *history* that in the context of new media culture's seeming absence of historical consciousness still has many challenges remaining.